

ANNABEL

THE TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER VIII. THE TELEGRAPH SUMMONS—A GLAD SURPRISE—THE MYSTERY STILL IMPENETRABLE—THE DEATH CHAMBER AT ROCKSTONE.

"Very kind in you to say so, sir. But let it be small or great, my use to him is high over, for, as I said before, sir, he's a-dying, and that vagabond o' a robber has murdered him."

"How sad," murmured Annabel, in a tone of pity. "Has he done nothing to discover the wretch?" asked Philip. "Has he not given information to the authorities?"

"Not a bit on him, sir. He's given information to no one; and, more nor that, he charged me never to mention it. Not a soul in Rockstone knows how he came by his illness."

"Singular—most singular!" ejaculated Philip. "The mystery seems to deepen rather than decrease. Yet it must be near its termination now, Annabel," he added, turning to his silent companion;

"in a very little while now we shall understand what it means." "But, oh, Philip!" she whispered, "I am so sorry to know he is dying. I do hope Jim is mistaken in this."

"I wish with all my heart I was Miss Annabel; but 'twas't my opinion only; the doctor said as much this morning, and that, I take it, was why you were sent for so quick. I have seen it coming for a day or two back, and only wish as how we may be in time."

"Have we still far to go?" inquired Philip. "Not very far; a matter of twenty minutes will take us to the lodge gate. A rare grand place—Rockstone is, too; as mortal fine estate as any to be seen in Yorkshire. It's said it will come to mis-sus when the old gent's am dies. So it will be a tidy windfall for her. Got along, Bes-sie lass; stretch your legs, my beauty, and you'll get at you oats all the sooner."

"How strange that he did not seek to communicate with Mrs. Langton while he remained at Mrs. Dobson's," remarked Annabel. "Very," assented Philip. "But the whole thing is strange, and to us at present inexplicable."

Jim had now got the black mare to go at such an accelerated pace that further conversation was impracticable. The pair therefore retreated into the silence of their own thoughts, while every moment brought them nearer to Rockstone. Let us precede them thither, and enter the room in which the owner of the man-sion lay dying.

For dying he was, as could be only too easily seen by the excessive paleness of his face, the sharpness of his features, and that dread expression of countenance which tells unmistakably of the awful change which is at hand. He sat up in bed, his head and shoulders supported by pillows, to render his laboured breathing more easy. On a chair by the side of the couch sat Mr. Langton anxiously regarding him, as he was revealed by the shaded lamp which stood upon the table, surrounded by phials of medicine and a silver jug containing the draught which served to recruit at intervals the sinking energies of the dying one.

No other person was in the room, and for some minutes there was deep silence, broken only by the loud and heavy breathing of the sufferer. The latter was not asleep, for his eyes were wide open, and ever and anon they sought the face of his friend with a wistful look. By-and-by his breathing grew less laboured, and he whispered— "Joseph."

"Yes, my dear Seymour," was the prompt answer, in a sympathetic tone. "Can I help you in any way?" "Give me the draught. I want to speak to you."

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